



CONGRESSWOMAN GABRIELLE GIFFORDS

1728 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING ■ WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515

1661 NORTH SWAN – SUITE 112 ■ TUCSON, AZ 85712

77 CALLE PORTAL – SUITE B-160 ■ SIERRA VISTA, AZ 85635

H.R. 2699

Armed Forces Behavioral Health Awareness Act

Significant issues remain with behavioral healthcare for our servicemembers. Despite ongoing efforts to improve access to care, the tragic results of repeated deployments persist throughout the force.

As the nature of these conflicts has changed, so too have the signature wounds of our servicemembers and their behavioral health needs continue to grow.

Symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress often lay dormant and may not appear until months or years after a servicemember has come home. Extended and repeated deployments increase stressors and, often, the behavioral care servicemembers need is unavailable or insufficient. And, increasingly, those serving in-theater are members of the National Guard and Reserve who do not remain at large military bases after their deployments and may not have the same access to traditional military care facilities as their Active Duty counterparts.

The Armed Forces Behavioral Health Awareness Act is designed to update and expand behavioral health programs, grow the behavioral health work force and increase access to care.

Endorsed by the National Guard Association of the United States (NGAUS), the Air Force Sergeants Association and Military Families United, this bill approaches the problem of behavioral health care in three key ways:

- ❖ Makes any Armed Forces member who serves in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) or Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) eligible for readjustment counseling and related behavioral health services through Vet Centers regardless of whether the member is on Active Duty at the time of receipt of counseling and services;
- ❖ Directs the Secretary of Defense to award grants to nonprofit organizations that provide emotional support services for survivors of deceased members of the Armed Forces; and
- ❖ Directs the establishment of a pilot program at Fort Huachuca and two other facilities to assess the feasibility and advisability of various ways to enhance PTSD awareness among members of the Army.

UPDATE: Section II of the Armed Forces Behavioral Health Awareness Act, which provides Vet Center access to all OIF and OEF veterans, was included in the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act that was signed into law on May 5, 2010.